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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study of transfer education conducted by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, students and faculty were surveyed to determine what community college leaders could do to assist students who want to transfer to four-year institutions and eventually earn a baccalaureate degree. The findings of these surveys resulted in several suggestions for strengthening the transfer function, including: (1) college leaders should communicate the importance of transfer to college constituencies by establishing a high-level administrative position to deal with transfer, commissioning research on the effectiveness of transfer education at the college, and opening communications with senior institutions; (2) the curricula and services of the college should be reorganized to promote transfer more effectively and coordinate the efforts of faculty, administrators, and researchers; (3) the procedural and qualitative aspects of transfer should be improved by such means as revising college catalogs to include transfer requirements, and providing training to help counselors and faculty develop skills in advising potential transfers; and (4) transfer and articulation agreements should be created with senior institutions within the community college's service district. (EJV)

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STRENGTHENING TRANSFER OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

What can community college leaders do to assist students who want to transfer to four-year institutions and eventually earn a baccalaureate? A recent study undertaken by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) addresses this issue. After surveying students and faculty in transferable courses at 22 urban community colleges, the Center outlined several suggestions for strengthening the transfer function. These suggestions are summarized below.

COMMUNICATING THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSFER TO COLLEGE CONSTITUENCIES

Institutional policies are important not only as guidelines for action, but also as symbolic gestures that convey the importance of stated goals to institutional constituencies. While all community colleges place transfer education in institutional mission statements, the high priority of transfer education can be conveyed by college leaders in a variety of other ways. In this regard, college leaders are urged:

--to voice concern for the transfer function at formal and informal meetings with faculty, students, and staff;

--to delegate the responsibility for transfer education to a high-level office within the college's administrative hierarchy;

--to commission institutional research studies on the effectiveness of transfer education at the college;

--to form special committees of faculty,students, and staff to address problems related to transfer;

--to open communications with the presidents of senior institutions and solicite their support in strengthening transfer.

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Such activities leave no doubt that transfer success of students is a top policy concern.

HOW CAN COLLEGE CURRICULA AND SERVICES BE BETTER ORGANIZED TO PROMOTE TRANSFER?

One serious weakness in transfer education is the lack of coordination between the various teaching and service units of the college. Indeed, the responsibility for transfer education is shouldered by different sectors of the college community: faculty are responsible for the curriculum; counselors and other student personnel workers are responsible for academic support services; and institutional researchers are responsible for collecting data on student characteristics, needs, and outcomes. But these tasks are interdependent and should be carried out in a coordinated manner. For instance, the student information gathered by institutional researchers loses its potential value if it is never used in curriculum development or in the formulation of counseling policies.

To bring about greater integration and coordination of transfer education, the following recommendations were made by the CSCC researchers:

--define the range of services related to transfer education and identify areas for joint efforts between two or more separate offices;

--establish a transfer education policy council if no one office exists to oversee the transfer function;

—identify potential transfer students at entrance so that they may receive special services, especially during their first year;

--assign these students to a specific counselor who has been trained to work with potential transfer students;

—provide college orientation sessions for the entering students.

These steps help assure that all college services join in a coordinated effort to identify potential transfer students and meet their special needs.

IMPROVING THE PROCEDURAL AND QUALITATIVE ASPECTS OF TRANSFER

Transfer education embodies procedural and qualitative aspects. The procedural aspect refers to the delivery of services that help students complete the steps necessary to transfer. Such services include the provision of information about course transferability or the provision of assistance in completing senior college admissions forms. The qualitative aspects refer to those steps taken by the college to facilitate a smooth transition from the community college environment to that of the senior college. Preparing the student to compete academically in the four-year college, for example, is part

of the qualitative aspect of transfer education.

In addition to defining the range of services to be provided to prospective transfer students, community colleges should consider the following possible ways of strengthening the procedural and quantitative aspects of transfer education.

--revise college catalogs to include information on transfer requirements;

--provide prospective transfer students with a packet on transfer opportunities;

--make sure that faculty, counselors, and others who have responsibility for advising potential transfer students keep abreast of changing transfer requirements;

--allow faculty the opportunity to meet with their counterparts at senior institutions in order to gain information about course content and requirements;

--insure that course assignments require students to hone the reading, writing, and research skills that are necessary to academic success at the senior institution;

--disseminate information on special, transfer-related services offered by the college;

--provide training sessions that help counselors and faculty developtheir skills in advising potential transfer students.

In addition to these recommendations, colleges should try to provide a full array of second-year, sophomore-level courses. In most community colleges, these courses are severely attenuated because of the shortfall in enrollment at that level. It will be difficult to overcome this problem, because as long as students may transfer without obtaining an associate degree for a two-year program of study, community colleges will have difficulty in attracting enough sophomore-level students to fill second-year courses.

ARTICULATING WITH SENIOR INSTITUTIONS

One of the most effective ways of enhancing transfer is to work out a transfer agreement with a single senior institution within the service district of the community college. Instead of statewide articulation agreements (which almost always fall short of improving transfer), transfer has been made more feasible when pairs of institutions work out arrangements at the department or program level. Such arrangements, for example, have been made between Arizona State University and the Maricopa Community College District. There, committees comprised of personnel from individual programs at both institutions design curricula and student information systems that enhance the flow of students from the community college to the senior college level.

CONCLUSION

The preceding paragraphs have summarized the major recommendations of a national study of the transfer function at community colleges. Further information on the study and its findings can be obtained in the full study report:

Cohen, A.M., Brawer, F.B., and Bensimon, E.M. Transfer Education in American Community Colleges. Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1985. (ED 255 250)

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